CLAIMS

I claim:

1. An apparatus for generating a frank, comprising:

a franking request receipt module, operative to receive a request for at least one frank;

a franking generation module operative to generate a frank in response to the request for at least one frank and operatively connected to the franking request receipt module; and

a frank transmission module operative to transmit a generated frank, the frank transmission module operatively connected to the franking generation module.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the franking request receipt module, franking generation module, and frank transmission module are co-located at a franking server.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the franking request receipt module further comprising an communication receipt module operative to receive a communication; and

the apparatus further comprising a franking attachment module operative to attach a generated frank to a received communication, the franking attachment module operatively connected to the communication receipt module and franking generation module.

4. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein:

the communication receipt module is further operative to determine whether the communication is franked or unfranked; and

the apparatus further comprising a verification module operative to verify the authenticity of a frank affixed to a franked communication, the verification module operatively connected to the communication receipt module and further operative to receive the communication from the communication receipt module.

5. The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising:

a sender module, the sender module comprising:

a franking generation request module, the franking generation request module operative to generate the request for at least one frank; and

a franking request transmission module operative to transmit the request for at least one frank and operatively connected to the franking generation request module.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising:

a frank receipt module operative to receive the generated frank from the frank transmission module;

a database for storing the generated frank, the database operatively connected to the frank receipt module; and

a frank attachment module operative to attach the generated frank to the communication, the frank attachment module operatively connected to the database.

7. An apparatus for generating and sending a franked communication, comprising:

a frank request module operative to request a frank;

a frank attachment module operative to attach the frank requested by the frank request module to a communication, thereby creating a franked communication; and

a franked communication transmission module operative to transmit the franked communication.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising a frank receipt module operative to receive the frank requested by the frank request module, further operative to pass the frank to the frank attachment module.

9. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising a frank receipt module operative to receive the frank requested by the frank request module; and

a frank storage module operative to store the frank requested by the frank request module.

10. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising a frank generation module operative to generate a frank in response to the request by the frank request module.

11. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising a sender system on which the frank request module, frank attachment module, franked transmission module, and franked receipt module reside.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, further comprising a network node on which the frank attachment module, franked transmission module, and frank generation module reside.

13. An apparatus for receiving and processing a franked communication, comprising:

a communication receipt module operative to receive a communication;

a determination module operative to determine whether the communication is franked, the determination module operatively connected to the communication receipt module; and

a franked communication processing module operative to process the communication according to a first rule in the event the communication is franked, the franked communication processing module operatively connected to the determination module.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a non-franked communication processing module operative to process the communication according to a second rule in the event the communication is not franked, the non-franked communication processing module operatively connected to the determination module.

15. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising a display module operative to display the communication in a first state dictated by the first rule.

16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the display module is further operative to display the communication in a second state dictated by the second rule.

17. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the communication receipt module, determination module, franked communication processing module, and non-franked communication processing module are incorporated into an electronic mail application.

18. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the communication receipt module, determination module, franked communication processing module, and non-franked communication processing module are co-located at a network node associated with an Internet service provider.

19. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the communication receipt module, determination module, franked communication processing module, and non-franked communication processing module are co-located at a recipient system.

20. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the communication receipt module, determination module, franked communication processing module, and non-franked communication processing module are co-located at a mail server.